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Legislative Testimony on HB 5300

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I grew up in a family culture that emphasized fear over real love and respect, and prioritized obedience over communication. Because of that, I learned to pay attention to the subtle changes in attitude and comfort levels of the people helping me succeed. I noticed a significant shift in the behavior and communication of faculty shortly after the consolidation was announced, and watched as people were fired, demoted, or pressured to retire early. The atmosphere in the community college I've grown to love has grown tense and unsafe. Such an environment is not conducive to learning or teaching effectively, which, as a current student, is a matter of serious concern to me. While I take issue with many of the potential consequences of consolidating Connecticut's community colleges, it is the shift in environment that the prospect has triggered on my campus and how that could affect my future plans that I find easiest to talk to you about today.

Forcing faculty and students who take issue with the CSCU consolidation into submission is not the way to go about creating change. It doesn't make the schools look enticing to potential future educators, either.

I had seriously considered a future as an educator at a Connecticut community college up until I saw how the faculty members I respected were being treated and heard how they felt. I don't want to work for an institution that I can't trust to respect my concerns, or my allies' concerns; I don't want to enter into or support a system that was established through bullying and intimidation, because if I did, could I ever feel safe speaking up, too?

I understand that consolidating our community colleges is not synonymous with the apocalypse, and that similar efforts worked out for SOME— some, a few— states, but I don't believe my Connecticutian comrades are going about the process with the level of care and consideration needed for a successful, moderately painless consolidation.

"Students First" is a cute slogan, but it has always rang hollow to me. Some of Connecticut's community college students may choose to stick around and become their state's educators— but not if they see the generations that came before them mistreated.

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